



BODY IMAGE

How Being A Dancer Helped Me Appreciate My Body, Not Criticize It

MAY 2 by NATALIE ZISA

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Being a dancer comes with having to fight off a lot of stereotypes, specifically regarding body image.

By the time I was 18, I was asked more than once if my dance teachers enforced a specific diet. I was shocked by the question. But when you consider the images of dancers in the media, it's understandable that people think they're extra critical of their body. One girl was accepted to a college dance program on the condition she lost 20 pounds by the fall. One of the main characters in *Center Stage*, a movie about ABT dancers, suffered from bulimia. And let's not forget about the craziness that was *Black Swan*. But these are the exceptions, not the norm.

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Growing up, I never felt any pressure to fit into a costume nor was I told to move to the back due to my weight. I was never told I had to shed a couple of pounds before the next show or watch what I ate. The only conversations we ever had were to eat foods that were going to benefit us as dancers, make us stronger, get us off the ground faster.

As a twenty-year-old girl, I care about what my body looks like. I hold it up to certain standards the same way everybody else does. But I can honestly say being a dancer doesn't make me more critical of my body, it's helped me appreciate it.

My body can get me through an hour and a half Jumps & Turns class without stopping mid warm-up. My body can get me through hours of rehearsal without throwing up or fainting. My arms are strong enough to support my fellow dancers in a lift. My abs help me hold a balance on one leg and successfully complete a turn. My legs, short but strong, get me high off the ground in a leap. And I have enough stamina to dance at least two numbers back to back, with a smile on my face.

When I dance, I actually feel the most confident. I thrive off of being able to get lower in a split than I was last week, do more push ups than last class, and get higher than I'm used to. I live for the process of improvement. I love knowing that every ounce of effort I put in will reap a benefit.

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When I do compare myself to other girls, whether they be dancers or not, I remind myself what my body is capable of. I would not have the body I have and would not be capable of doing the things I can do if it wasn't for dance. Dance doesn't hurt my self-esteem, it helps it.

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So, I'm here to knock the stereotype once again. Dancers are healthy and strong human beings. There is no one body type that is required to be a dancer. Diets are not mandatory and eating disorders are not actually that common. They're just like other athletes who need to know when to push themselves and when to rest. They have good and bad days, whether it be based on their performance, their diet, or simply their attitude.

I love dance for many reasons, but one of them is definitely because it reminds me how valuable my body is. It reminds me to take care of it, appreciate it, and love it for what it is.



Images via James Jin Images

TAGS: BODY APPRECIATION, DANCE, DANCER, FIT, HEALTHY, POSITIVE BODY IMAGE, STRONG



NATALIE ZISA

NATALIE ZISA, FORDHAM UNIVERSITY MAJOR: COMMUNICATIONS & MEDIA STUDIES/JOURNALISM HER HEART BELONGS TO: DANCE, HER FAMILY, AND THE BEACH HER GUILTY PLEASURES: BRUNCH, SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME ON INSTAGRAM, AND CARROT CAKE DONUTS FROM DOUGHNUT PLANT TAKE HER AWAY TO: LITERALLY ANYWHERE IN ITALY - OR AN ISLAND



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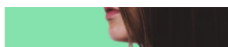
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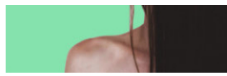


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